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## Human Aggression Paradox



*Humans are, all things considered, a pretty normal species. Yet in one regard they defy all norms. This is called the human aggression paradox.*

100 years ago, Diplomatic Headquarters, Earth

"We have just received a communique from the Bodargon. They have challenged us for the Thea 5274 system."

"Challenged? What, are they claiming it's part of their territory?"

"The translators say it's more of a declaration that they will take the system from us by force."

"Sounds more like a declaration of war to me, then."

"Well, yes. But the translators caution that their translations may still be incorrect."

"Don't tell me. They always say that. I would too if the outbreak of an interstellar war depended on my translations. Well, I don't want it either. Forward it to the government, and it's their problem."

"Will do."

"Oh, and give the fleet a heads-up too. Unofficially of course."

"Of course."

Two weeks and 150 light-years later. Flag bridge of the UNS James, flagship of the second human fleet.

"How long until we reach Thea 5274?"

"We are leaving hyperspace in ten minutes, Sir!"

"Good. Fleet status?", Admiral Robertson asked.

"All ships report ready for battle, Sir!", Communication officer Jon Howard answered.

That was the fourth time in ten minutes, Jon thought to himself. The admiral is just as nervous as all of us. No wonder though. It will be the first confrontation between a human fleet and an alien one, ever. Who knows what is going to happen.

After way too much time the navigation announcement finally sounded from the bridge speakers, "Leaving hyperspace in 5...4...3...2...1...Drop!".

Deep inside the ship, Jon noticed nothing of the giant energies set free by the transition from hyperspace. Just a flicker from the status indicator in the corner, and they were 2 light-hours from Thea 5274, a K-Type star in the middle of nowhere.

"What's the status?"

"Looks empty. There's the colony station above Thea 3, and some smaller ships between it and the asteroid belt, probably miners. That's it.", came from navigation.

Jon could feel the tension leave the bridge crew. "Seems like we were fast enough. Contact the colony.", the admiral ordered.

"Yes, Sir. Based on our distance we expect an answer at the earliest in 3 hours, 55 minutes."

"Good. Direct course for Thea 3. And tell the fleet to reduce readiness."

3 hours and 58 minutes later, Jon glanced at his screen again, waiting for an answer from the Thea 3 colony. They had already picked up omnidirectional chatter from the various mining ships, indicating that everything is alright, so he was not overly nervous, but still.

There, a new inbound message! "Message-Type: Bodargon-Simple". Fuck.

"Sir, we just received a bodargon message. The interpretation team is working on it."

The temperature in the room seemed to drop by a several degrees. "From where?", came back from the command chair.

"Right from the colony. Either from the station or right next to it."

"Navigation, keep the eyes open. Make sure we don't have a surprise fleet hiding somewhere."

"Yes, Sir!"

*Ping*, another message. From the colony station.

"Received another message. From the colony this time. They say there is a bodargon ship hanging around Thea 3, but they haven't touched the colony yet."

"Good, maybe we still have a chance to solve this without bloodshed. Keep the course and let's wait on the translation."

Jon all but stared at his screen, waiting for the translation. What did it take so long, it had already been, he glanced over at the clock, barely two minutes. Couldn't the clock go faster or something? How long would this take? He glanced over at the clock. Another 10 seconds gone by. While the rest of the bridge was searching for a hidden fleet somewhere, all he could do was wait, until... *Ping*, sounded from his headphones. Finally, the translation. Or, as they called it, "Preliminary interpretation". He opened it and, this made no sense?

"Sir, we have received a first draft! The Bodargon are asking why we brought so many ships? Something about this system only worth 'a thousand units'? Unknown, what is meant by units. Anyway, they are inviting us over to their ship, to 'discuss the battle plan'?"

"So, on the positive, we are stronger than they thought. On the negative, I want to murder the cultural exchange team. Let's wait for the full translation, and then we will know more. Tell the fleet we don't expect hostilities in the immediate future."

Several hours and too many messages sent back and forth between the Fleet and the Bodargon "Small War Ship", as they had learnt, later.

Admiral Robertson looked around the table, full of tired faces, "So, to summarize. When a nation challenges another for territory, they use some weird formular to calculate the worth of the territory and then both sides sent that amount to a predetermined battleground to 'battle it out'? And in our case that is one thousand ground soldiers?".

"More or less. They also take the size of the nations into account for fairness, plus a host of other factors, but that is the important part.", Laura Rennel, Head of Interpretation confirmed.

"So, it's a war game. Just with death. And against an enemy which have perfected it.", she shook her head, "This is a fight we can't win."

"But, we have a whole fleet. Just blow them out of the sky and be done with it."

"And what then? This is barely worth calling a conflict. The system is nearly worthless. But when we attack them outside their game, who knows how they will react. Maybe we could roll over them like nothing, or humans are history in a year. No, we will get our people out of here, give them an empty system and let the smart people back home figure out how to handle them the next time."

"The next time?"

"Of course. They have a codified way to do battle for territory. This might as well be daily business for them."

One year later, Earth

"They have taken K539-56 as well. The Ardonians this time."

"That makes five in just the last 2 months. This can't continue!"

"But what can we do, Mr. President? We have analyzed their battle games, and, even ignoring the moral issues, we are wholly unable to win against them. It is their game, and they have perfected it."

"And a direct attack?"

"None of these systems are worth nearly enough to justify a war. In fact, we haven't actually lost anything yet other than time for the colony ships."

"But what when they reach the colonies? At that point we will have to defend us regardless. And if we can't win their games by then..."

"We might be in luck there", Robert Niles, Head of Cultural Exchange, interrupted, "we are still not sure about the details, but their seems to be an exclusion zone around every home system. My team believes they won't challenge us for systems inside it."

"How large is it?"

"About 50 light-years from Earth in every direction."

"We need to be sure. The colony in Hydrox AD4 is 45 light-years away. If that is safe, we may avoid a war altogether."

"No war, that'd be great. The sol wars were bad enough."

"We also need to issue a general stop for building permanent installations further out than say 40 light years for now. And tell the miners and everyone else out there to just move on when someone wants that system."

"Yes, Sir."

"And prepare statements for when this gets out. Something along the lines of 'We will not let our citizens die in meaningless war games!', 'We defend the peace!', 'The aliens are too dumb to do real war!' and so on. We can turn this into a positive thing, we just have to do it right!"

Today

"Humans are, all things considered, a pretty normal species. Yet in one regard they defy all norms. This is called the human aggression paradox."

The lecture hall was packed. The lecture *Cultural values and how they vary across species* always had a high attendance, but today's lecture on *The Human Paradox* filled every last seat (as well as most of the ground).

"It is well known that every successful sapient species has a certain level of aggression, from the individual over groups to their largest nations. This is a simple requirement for survival. Regardless whether they are herbivores or carnivores, a group of any size can be aggressive. Yes, even a peace-loving herbivore backed into a corner will rather charge their attacker than letting themselves be killed, in a herd they might stampede over their predators and as a nation they will battle for any system they might make a home."

The audience nodded along, the *Theory of Equal Aggression* standing solid for the last five centuries.

"Yet humans defy this rule in the most absurd way possible. The aggression of an individual and or group is classified as *Slightly above average*, just as 15 percent of all sapient species. Yet on a national level, they are the only species to ever be classified as *Fully Peaceful*, with no recorded conflicts. In fact, they are the only species where the national aggression index is more than one step below the individual or group level."

"Sadly, to this day we have not been able to find an explanation for their missing aggression. Many, me included, believe there is still a large hole in our ability to understand each other, as every question on this matter is answered with this nonsensical statement."

*We don't play war. We either do war, or we don't.*